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ABSTRACT

To facilitate the extemporaneous speaking style, the preferred method of speech delivery in public speaking classes, students are advised to take a notecard with key words and phrases on it with them as they deliver the speech. In other words, the speech is to be well rehearsed but not given completely from memory or from a detailed manuscript. Advice for notecard content and use is abundant in public speaking texts. But students with language learning disabilities (LLD), particularly dyslexia, may find using a notecard in the extemporaneous speaking format creates confusion and anxiety and does not work well when they are giving presentations in class. With knowledge of the nature of dyslexia, an instructor can learn to deal effectively with LLD students in the college classrooms. Nina L. Rynberg, Reading Specialist at Lake Superior State University, recommends that dyslexic students be encouraged to use as few words as possible on their notecards, stressing that a word or two (written in large type) is better than phrases or sentences. Rynberg also suggests the dyslexic student considers incorporating color by using a different color pen or highlighter to differentiate between words on the notecard. Amy White, Director of the Dyslexic Resource Center in Howell, Michigan, explains that many dyslexic college students have been trained to develop their own transcription method for taking notes in class that often involves visuals, logos, and acronyms. This can be used on notecards as well. (Contains 11 references.) (NKA)

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The dyslexic student and the public speaking notecard

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The majority of public speaking courses taught at the undergraduate university level in the speech communication discipline stress extemporaneous speaking as the preferred method of speech delivery. Extemporaneous speaking, as outlined in introductory texts, is a blend of careful preparation and spontaneity. The speaker prepares and practices the speech in advance, but wording may change while the speech is being delivered (Lucas, 1989).

In order to facilitate this extemporaneous style, students are advised to take a notecard, with key words and phrases on it, with them when they deliver a speech in order to trigger complete thoughts and ideas (Rothwell, 2000). In other words, the speech is to be well rehearsed, but not given completely from memory or from a detailed manuscript.

Suggestions for speakers' notecards vary in detail, but not in overall approach. For example, Zarefsky (1999) recommends outlining each Roman numeral of the formal outline on a separate notecard. Scott and Brydon (1997) suggest the speaker use brief notes instead of a manuscript. Osborn and Osborn (1991) explain that this abbreviated key-word outline should be written on two or three index cards and words should be written with large letters that can be easily read. The notecard might also contain essential statistics and quotations (Lucas, 1989).

Advice for notecard content and use is abundant in public speaking texts. However, this advice may not apply well to all university students. Students with language learning disabilities (LLD), particularly dyslexia, may find using a notecard in the format most frequently recommended creates confusion and anxiety and does not work well when they are giving presentations in class.

Dyslexia is a neurocognitive deficit that is connected to reading and spelling processes (Frost, 1995). According to Sims (1974), in a popular sense, dyslexia refers to an abnormality that makes people reverse letters.

Difficulties in silent reading and spelling translate to difficulties in oral reading for dyslexic students. Oral reading by dyslexics can be inaccurate since they have inadequate decoding skills (Aaron & Phillips, 1986). According to Hoskins (1990):

> As communicators, humans express themselves in language, in a range of mediums. Although spoken and written language are distinct systems, they interact in intricate ways in each language learner. (p. 47)

Instructors are likely to be seeing more LLD students arrive at college noticeably lacking in the basic skills of reading, writing, and spelling, partly because of open admissions and the increased number of community colleges (Davis, 1975; Sims, 1974). These students present a challenge because there is little literature on how to teach older LLD students - most of what is known about dyslexia focuses on students at the elementary school level (Davis, 1975).

Because instructors are not always likely to understand the needs of dyslexic students, the college experience of these students may be filled with frustration, embarrassment, and rejection (Sims, 1974). Davis (1975) advises:

> (W)e must take seriously the right of the language learning disabled student to pursue higher education, and then find ways to help him develop to the limit of his potential. (p. 1)

With some knowledge of the nature of dyslexia, an instructor can learn to deal effectively with LLD students in the college classroom (Sims, 1974).

In order to reduce the anxiety of, and increase the speaking performance of dyslexic students, there are several tips instructors can give students when explaining how to prepare a public speaking notecard for an extemporaneous assignment. Nina L. Rynberg, Reading Specialist at Lake Superior State University recommends that dyslexic students be encouraged to use as few words as possible on their notecards, stressing that a word or two is better than phrases or sentences (N.L. Rynberg, personal communication, October 23, 2000). The words should be written in large type. Rynberg (2000) also suggests the dyslexic student consider incorporating color by using a different color pen or highlighter to differentiate between words on the notecard.

The use of color-coding is supported by the work of Johnson (1985). She found in reviewing the literature on dyslexia, that color coding of certain parts of speech could be beneficial for students who have trouble reading because of difficulty recognizing morphological endings.

Amy White, director of the Dyslexia Resource Center in Howell, Michigan, recommends the use of "pictures, drawings, and logos" on speaking notecards instead of specific words (A. White, personal communication, October 25, 2000). She explains that many dyslexic college students have been trained to develop their own transcription method for taking notes in class and often the most effective transcription method for these students involves creating their own system of visuals, logos, and acronyms. This visual shorthand can be used on public speaking notecards as well. Rynberg (2000) also advises students draw visuals on their cards to remind them of key ideas as opposed to using words.

By becoming more aware of the oral reading challenges that face the dyslexic student in the public speaking course, instructors can be better equipped to assist LLD students in how to best prepare a notecard for an extemporaneous speech. If dyslexic students use single words in large type and/or visual cues on the speaking notecard, they should be able to reduce the anxiety and frustration they may have faced in the past when speaking extemporaneously.

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